

The Syrian Churches Series

Edited by Jacob Vellian

Vol. X

Deaconess in the Church

A Pastoral Need of the Day?

A STUDY TEXT

Prepared by

MAR KURIAKOSE KUNNACHERRY

Bishop of Kottayam.

Sept. 8, 1987

KOTTAYAM, KERALA, INDIA

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

Ex Libris

Beth Hhardutho Library

The Malphon George Anton Kiraz Collection

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

Anyone who asks for this volume, to read, collate, or copy from it, and who appropriates it to himself or herself, or cuts anything out of it, should realize that s/he will have to give answer before God's awesome tribunal as if s/he had robbed a sanctuary. Let such a person be held anathema and receive no forgiveness until the book is returned. So be it, Amen! And anyone who removes these anathemas, digitally or otherwise, shall himself receive them in double.

DEACONESS IN THE CHURCH

Deaconess in the Church

A Pastoral Need of the Day ?

A STUDY TEXT

Prepared by

MAR KURIAKOSE KUNNACHERRY

Bishop of Kottayam.

Sept. 8, 1987

KOTTAYAM, KERALA, INDIA

I

The *Laos* in the Tradition of the Syro-Malabar Church

1. The word 'LAYMAN' has in its common use a pejorative sense, often standing for the non-professional over against the superior knowledge of the scientist and the specialist. In the Church too, ever since the Protestant revolution, there is a lingering suspicion of the laity as second class citizens coming only after the bishops and the clergy who were supposed to be privileged members. Vatican Council II reversed this idea in the *Lumen Gentium* deliberately placing the chapter III on the hierarchy after the discussion of the Church as a mystery and as the People of God in chapter II. The Code of Canon Law has followed it up with a special stress on the sanctifying role of the whole people of God (Can. 835), the communal nature of liturgical worship (Can. 851) in the Eucharist (Can. 897) and the anointing of the sick (Can. 1002). It is to be pointed out that this centrality of the people in the life of the Church is basic to the whole outlook of the Oriental Church.

2. The Syro-Malabar Church rooted in the East Syrian ecclesial tradition focuses attention on the holy people of God gathered around the Risen Lord. So the *laos* or laity came in the first place and the hierarchy and the clergy were rightly considered the leaders and ministers called to serve the people. This predominance of the laity came on account of several historical and theological reasons. First of all the East Syrian Church from its Edessan origins was deeply influenced by the example of the Essenian and Qumran communities and the early Christians of this Church considered Baptism as an entry into a covenanted life of constant vigilance regarding faith in the company of "watchers" ܩܕܝܫܐ or angels. Though marriage

was considered legitimate and noble, celibacy was the high ideal of one's aloneness with the Only Begotten of God. Even after monasticism became a distinct form of life within the Church the monastic spirit and outlook has remained the distinct heritage of the people. It felt itself as the grace-acting community, with every member having a share in the sanctifying role of the Church.

3. There was a wide involvement of the whole Church, both men and women in the celebration of the Sacraments: This is particularly evident by the role of the *Msamsanitha* ~~ܡܫܡܫܢܝܬܐ~~ or deaconess who was specially ordained to help in the administration of baptism to women, to distribute Holy Communion under special circumstances and form etc. Even today the ordination service of bishops in some Oriental Rites contains words explicitly conferring power to ordain deaconesses.¹

4. The Eucharist was the communitarian service of the whole people. It began with the celebration of the Word in the middle of the Church, the people standing around the Bishop and the clergy. Then their gifts moved to the Eastern end of the church where the altar was located. All through, the Divine Liturgy appeared one celebration of the people led by the bishop, as Louis Bouyer specially remarks, regarding the East Syrian Liturgy.² The ceremonies and traditions surrounding weddings show the protracted involvement of the whole Christian community actively helping the young couple through preaching and instruction.³ Similarly the Anointing of the Sick was a communitarian service. Giving the Sacrament

1. "Through the power of the gifts, he may make priests and deacons sub-deacons and deaconesses for the ministry of the Holy Church." Prayer of imposition of hand to ordain bishops, East Cyrian Church: G. P. Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, Vol II, London, 1852 p. 346.

2. L. BOUYER, *Eucharist*, Notre Dame, 1968.

3. 'Symposium on Knanites, Jubilee Celebrations of the Diocese of Kottayam, Ed. by Jacob Vellian, Kottayam, 1986, ('Social Customs') pp. 105, 110.

of Confirmation along with Baptism makes the initiation sacraments a single solemn welcome given by the whole community to the neophytes. The Sacrament of Reconciliation was an entirely communitarian celebration of repentance.

5. This active involvement of the laity was particularly a necessity for the church of St. Thomas Christians which was for long periods deprived of bishops who had to be selected and ordained from among the celibate monks of the *Mesopotamian* church. The faith of the people was nourished by the long communitarian vigils kept several times in the year, when the word of God was read and reflected upon in common presumably under the leadership of deacons and *deaconesses*.

6. There was an intimate relationship between the people and their priests. No one could be accepted for priestly training or ordained without the consent of the *palliyogam* or parish council. Priestly formation itself was not merely a training for ministry, but an ongoing interaction between the people and those selected to lead them: The ministers themselves felt part of the people. Sacred functions including the Divine Liturgy began with the celebrant formally asking the permission of the people. This *Puqdanakon* and *Puqdane Demasecha* ("Your command" "Command of Christ") is a ceremonial, but meaningful permission sought from the people of God at the beginning of Qurbana. This is in tune with permission sought in several ceremonies in connection with wedding-*anthamcharthu* (ceremonial shaving of the groom) and *mylanchi ideel* (painting the palms and feet of the bride),—even today prevalent in the Diocese of Kottayam.

What the Church needs today is an active involvement of the laity (both men and women) in all aspects of ecclesial life: The pilgrim people of God has to realise together its mission in the world to transform it into God's Kingdom.

II

Deaconess in the Church

A. In the New Testament

1. The concept of deacon is familiar to the apostolic times (Acts 6:1-6). There were permanent deacons in the early church. The role of permanent deacons existed universally in the early church and it continued to exist in the East unto our own days, whereas in the West after its extinction in the past it was resumed in recent years. This role of deacon was found helpful not only for a distribution of ministries, but also for partially remedying the problem of the shortage of priests.

2. With Christ and his disciples there were ladies ministering to them. St. Paul chose many women as his co-workers. Eg. Prisca, Lydea and Mary (*Rom. 16:6. Rom. 16:1. I Tim. 3:11* referring to women deacons); he includes women in charismatic functions (listed in I Cor. 12: 4-12, Rom. 12: 5-8, Eph. 4: 11-12). In I Cor. 11:5, Paul refers to a woman speaking publicly in the assembly. She wears *exousia* (authority) upon her head, probably a badge or sign of her prophetic role. (I Cor. 11:10)

3. Word used to translate *diakonos* in *Rom. 16:1* where Paul mentions Phoebe is presented as a *DIAKONOS* of the church of Cenchrea. Nowhere in NT there is a description of the ministry of a deaconess; But because of the above reference it is commonly believed that such an order of deaconess existed from apostolic times.

4. Greater ambiguity surrounds the mention of women in I Tim. 3:11 within a context of describing qualification of a deaconess. This passage may refer merely to the wives of deacons; but some interpreters take it as a reference to

deaconess. Obscure is the relation of deaconess to the order of widows in I Tim. 5:9-10.⁴

5. A clearer indication is found in a report of Pliny the Younger in 112 A. D. to the Emperor Trajan with response to his investigations of Christians. He had put to torture two christian handmaidens who are called deaconesses.⁵

6. From third century, the role of deaconess or lady deacon existed in the church and it became common in the Eastern churches, especially in the Syrian Church. Deaconesses were appointed by Bishops to minister to ladies in social and liturgical contexts.

7. Chief sources about the order of deaconess derive from the church orders and conciliar decrees of the 4th / 5th centuries.

B. Deaconess in Didascalia

The *Didascalia Apostolorum*, an early 4th century document gives an excellent survey of a deaconess. It instructs the bishop thus: "There are houses whither thou canst send a deacon to the woman on account of the heathen, but mayst send a deaconess. Also because in many other matters the office of a woman deacon is required. In the first place when women go down into the water, those who go down into the water ought to be anointed by a deaconess with the oil of anointing and where there is no woman at hand and especially no deaconess, he who baptizes must of necessity anoint her who is being baptized. But where there is a woman and especially a deaconess it is not fitting that woman should be seen by men; but with the imposition of hand do thou anoint the head only."⁶

According to this document:

1. Two main branches of the deaconal ministry in the church are of man and of woman—deacon and deaconess.

4. "Deaconess" The Interpreters' Dict. of Bible I, P. 786.

5. *Ancillis quae ministrae dicebantur* Epist. X 97,

6. R. H. CONNOLLY (ed), DIDASCALIA APOSTOLORUM, The Syriac Version translated, Oxford, 1929.

2. The area of competency of the deaconess is around baptism of ladies.
3. Main function of the deaconess is to help women. This is required for an adequate service in the Church. (Didascalia III 12, 1-12).
4. No role of eucharistic celebration is assigned to deaconess by Didascalia.
5. The rank of the deaconess is, probably, next to that of deacon. The Didascalia (II 26, 3-7) states that the Bishop should be honoured like the image of the Father and the deacon like that of Christ and the deaconess as the image of the Holy Spirit and the priests as the image of the Apostles.

Bishop anoints only the head of the woman who receives baptism. (III 12:2). The deaconess does the rest of the anointing. Then a man, not the deaconess, pronounces the divine names. Once they come out of water, it is the deaconess who welcomes them; and she instructs them.

6. The pastoral function of the deaconess is to help the women—needy and sick—to women in whose house there were still pagans and to where the Bishop could not send a deacon (III 12:4); II 4:1-2). Those who exercise this ministry should be the soul and mind of the Bishop (III 13:7). What is said about the deacon alone (in II 44) is repeated for both deacon and deaconess (in III 13:7).⁷

C. In Apostolic Constitution (end of the 4th Century)

Basically Apostolic Constitution agrees with *Didascalia* in regard to the deaconess. It makes mention of it several times. In addition to the informations in *Didascalia*, the Apostolic constitution sees the Deaconess as an ecclesiastical institution, and it gives a ceremony of Imposition of hands to impart diaconate to women.

7. C. VAGAGGINI, “L’ordinazione delle Diaconesse nelle Tradizione Greca e Byzantina *Orient. Christ. Per.* 40 (1974), 145-189.

Features:-

1. Liturgical function:

The Deaconess helps the Bishop at the baptism of ladies, for reasons of modesty. She helps at anointing, but the formula for baptism is recited by the Bishop or the priest (III 16:2-4).

She is active in the liturgical assembly. She gets the faithful together, guards the door of the church, and takes care of the poor and the foreigners.

2. More restrictions on the area of work:

Apostolic Constitution renews the prescription of Didascalia that women should not teach in the Church (III 6). A new argument is found in *Apostolic Constitution* against women interfering in ecclesiastical matters:

“The Lord did not send women to preach”.

“If man is the head of the woman, how can the body give command to the head”? (III 6:12).

3. Extra liturgical functions:

The deaconess helps women, and is a mediator for them before the Bishop. She is supposed to go with the women when they want to meet the Bishop or the deacons.

4. Deaconess as a Part of the Clergy

The deacons who “distribute among the clergy” the left over from the offerings brought at the eucharistic liturgy are directed to keep a proportion: 4 parts to the Bishops, to the priests 3 parts, to the deacons 2 parts, and 1 part to others, namely; subdeacon, reader, cantor and deaconess. (CA VIII, 31, 2): From this it is evident that deaconess is part of the clergy among whom offerings are distributed.

The deaconess is ordained by imposition of hands, as is the case of the Bishop, the priests and the deacon, subdeacon and the lector. “The virgins and widows and exorcists do not

receive imposition of hands''. In some places of Apostolic Constitution, deaconess is listed immediately after priests and deacon (VIII 19; II 3).

5. Comparing Cheirotonia of the deaconess with that of others:

It is clearly stated that virgin and widows are instituted and not consecrated, as Deaconess is consecrated with imposition of hand (VIII 24:5).

The importance and rank of the deaconess is expressed in dealing with the ordination: The Bishop is ordained by two or three Bishops in the presence of the presbyterium, and the deacons (VIII 4:6).

The priest is ordained by Bishop alone in the presence of priests and deacons (VIII 1:16). The deacon is ordained only by the Bishop in the presence of the priests, and deacons. (VIII 17:2) The deaconess is ordained only by the Bishop in the presence of priests, deacons and deaconesses, (VIII 19:2).

Apostolic Constitution gives the impression that Deaconess, though parallel to the deacon, is inferior to him. She is, however, superior to subdeacon, reader or widows.⁸

8. See Appendix II.

III

Byzantine Tradition After Apostolic Constitution

From the fifth century on, Deaconesses were seen plentifully in several parts of christendom.

Age, Duty, Ceremonies of Ordination

Deaconess was to be of 40 years of age and she could be chosen from the state of lay women; she could be a widow (once married), a virgin, a religious woman,, or an abbess. Often in Byzantine tradition deaconess was an abbess from about 11 th / 12 th century (Ms. Ethn. Bibl. 662 of the 12 th cent.). According to Theodosion code (390 A. D.) the deaconess was to be of 60 years of age (referring to 1 Tim. 3:9)⁹ and the 15 th canon of council of Chalcedon (451) fixed the age to not less than 40. The Novella 6.6 of Justinian (535) prescribed “about 50 years.”¹⁰

Those who, after ordination to diaconate, attempted to get married were severally punished, with excommunication by the Church, and with death by the civil law of Justinian (Mayer p. 28, p. 35-37).

Deaconesses were allotted to certain churches. Thus the church of Holy Wisdom in Constantinople had 40 deaconesses from the time of Justinian (527-65) to Ereclius (610-41) (Mayer pp. 34-35). According to canon 6 of Chalcedon, the deaconess were not to be ordained “absolutely”. They were to be

9. J. MAYER, *Monumenta de viduis, diaconissis Virginibusque troctantia* (Floribgium patristicum, fase 42) Bonn, 1939. p. 16.

10. Ibid p. 28.

ordained every time for a determinate church or a monastery or a Martyrium.

Code of Justinian (535 A. D.) prescribed the functioning of the deaconess as to serve at sacred baptismal celebration and to be present at the venerable mysteries (Mayer p. 38). Balsamon, (1142-45) a canonist, stated that the deaconess had a place around the Bema (Sanctuary). Later documents (1335. M Blasteres) suggested that "standing close by the deacons, they did the service of deacons. This is not confirmed by contemporary documents ¹¹.

The duties of the deaconess:

a. Didascalia

- to work among the heathens
- anoint women at baptismal ceremony : anoint the sick
- instruct the Neophytes
- to baptise ladies (to be present at the nude ones)

b. Bar Hebreus (1286)

- to anoint the ladies, to read the Scriptures at the prayer meetings of women, welcome the ladies baptised (who come out of water), to teach them to grow in humility and holiness.

c. Jacob of Edessa

- to serve the sick
- anoint the sick.

d. Synod of Maronites (1736)

- anoint the sick women.

e. 12 th century Armenian Liturgical text:

- to preach at the meetings of women.

11. Ibid 6, 64. 9

- f. *John Bar Qurson*
 - to light candles at liturgy
 - to incense
 - to wash the sacred vessels
 - to assist the celebrant if there is no deacon.
- g. *Abdiso, the compiler of Nestorian law*
 - the service of the deaconess is not to be in the sanctuary.
- h. *Council of Chalcedon*
 - to welcome foreigners at liturgical services
 - to guard the doors
- i. *Romano German Pontifical (10 Cent.)*
 - authority to read the gospel in vigils in the church
 - to begin the hours (canonical) in the church
 - to read the Gospel with the homily in the church.
- j. *Apostolic Constitution (5th Cent.), St. Ignatus of Antioch*
 - to keep the holy doors.
- k. *Greek Rite of Constantinople*
 - to minister in the Holy Places.
- l. *St. John Chrysostom*
 - to give instructions; to contribute to Bp's fund;
 - to carry on social works.

Once adult baptism disappeared, the state of deaconess also disappeared from the Church. However, it retained its rank among the religious and abbesses of monasteries.

The *Euchalogion* of the Byzantine Church, (Ms. Barb. Gree 336, 8th Cent.) gives the ordination of deaconess. It is clear that as other sacred Orders, the Order of deaconess is called *chairotonia*. The bishop lays hands over her head twice.

The ordination rites take place at the foot of the altar inside the sanctuary as it is obligatory in the ordinations of bishop, priests, and deacons, and which is prohibited to that of sub-deacons and readers. They were ordained in the diakonikon or in front of the Holy door, or even at the entrance of the church.

Ordination of Byzantine rite can be grouped into two: Those ordinations conducted at the altar within the sanctuary: Bishop, priest, deacon and deaconess. Those other Order like subdiaconate, reader and cantor, and "dignitaries" like Arch-deacon and abbot etc. were solemnised outside the sanctuary. This shows that "Deaconess" is part of the ecclesiastical "Order". Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-423) and St. John Chrysostom believed that Deaconess was an apostolic institution, referring to phoebe (1 Tim. 3:11).

The time of the ordination of deaconess

According to Ms. Barberini Gr. 336, Deaconess could be ordained just like the deacon, in the liturgy of the presanctified, just before Holy Communion.

The Formula of ordination

It is the same as that of the deacon with the initial phrase "The divine grace." This formula is used only for the ordination of the bishop, priest, deacon and deaconess and not for subdeacons and lector. This formula attributed to Simon of Salomica (before 131 A. D.) is seen in East Syrian and other oriental rites.

Stole

At the end of the ordination rites the deaconess is given a discorial stole, which is worn around the neck, under the veil, which covered the head. Both ends of the stole are hung in front. The stole is the same as that is given to a deacon.¹²

12. Giving a stole to the deaconess is found also in the Ordination of deaconess in the Roman Church (10th century) See Appendix I below.

The Chalice

The deaconess receives Holy communion immediately after the deacon. She received the Sacred Host from the bishop, and drank from the chalice offered to her by the deacons. Then the Bishop gives her the chalice to be placed on the Altar, while the deacons are given the chalice to give it to others. This is the only power given to her concerning the Eucharist. (But in the Nestorian church of the 4th to 5th century already, under special circumstances in the absence of priests and deacons), the deaconess was given the faculty to give Communion to ladies and children.¹³

13. Mayer p. 33; Testamentum Domini, *Ibid* p. 52, 22-25, Severus of Antioch (465-538), p. 52. John of Tella (433-538), p. 53; Jacob of Edessa (578), p. 54.

IV

Deaconess in the Syrian Tradition

Among the earlier Syriac Canonical sources the *Didascalia* has important information:

Ch. 9 "The deaconess, in the position of the Holy Spirit shall be honoured by you." (The bishop is "in the position of God Almighty" and the deacon "in the position of Christ").

Ch. 16 is on the ministry of deacons and deaconess (the deaconess is to anoint women at baptism, and instruct the newly baptised): "For this reason we say that the ministry of a woman, a deaconess, is particularly needed and important". She is also to visit the sick.¹⁴

In the *Testamentum Domini* the deaconesses receive several incidental mentions: in Ch. 19, 23, 35, 36, 40 of Book I; Ch. 20 of Book II.

The *Syrian Orthodox Synodicon*¹⁵ has a number of references; eg. vol. I p. 135 (of Engl. tr.); has Syriac translation of the *Canon of Chalcedon*, where Canon 14 states that a woman should not receive ordination as deaconess before the age of 40.

Vol. I, p. 159, *Questions from the Oriental Fathers* (6th cent.?). Q. 9 notes that in the Orient, Superiors of convents are deaconesses who distribute the Mysteries to those under their authority. Q. 11 "The ordination of deaconesses should take place according to the custom of the land. In the Orient the bishop also puts a stole on her shoulder as in the case of a deacon".

14. See Chapter II above.

15. Published by A. Voobus, CSCO 637-8, 375-6 Ser. Syri 151-4.

Vol. I, p. 202f, 242 various 7th cent. prescriptions for role of deaconess.

The most detailed description of the role of deaconesses is evidently in Barhebraeus' *Nomocanon*, VII, 7, where he collects together earlier canonical texts on them.

An ordination rite for deaconesses is given in Michael the Syrian's Pontifical¹⁶. Michael says it was no longer used in his day (12th cent.), but he took it from "old manuscripts" – in case occasion might in the future arise and a bishop might want to ordain a deaconess once again. (Assemani gives the preface of Michael stating this in his *dissertatio de Monophysitis*, unpaginated, in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* II). (It is heard that His Eminence Metropolitan Athanasius Yshu Samuel (Syr. Orth. Archbp. in USA) has another manuscript with this service in it). In the East Syrian tradition there are a number of 16th Cent. MSS which contain an *Ordo* for the ordination of deaconesses, notably Vatican Syr. 45 written by 'Joseph Metropolitan of the Indians'. The text of this was published, with Latin translation, by Assemuni.¹⁷

East Syrian Ordination of a Deaconess: Features to be Noted

1. Deaconess is to be of fairly advanced age.
2. She must be known for good works.
3. It is the bishop who approves her and ordains her.
4. Ceremony takes place in the *diakonikon*.
5. As in other Holy Orders, it is the Archdeacon who presents the candidate to the Bishop.
6. God is said to be "pleased alike with men and women" –
A motive for presenting the woman for diaconate –
"So as to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit".

16. Unpublished, in MS. Vat. Syr. 51; Latin translation by J. M. Voste.

17. Codex Liturgicus XIII, 219–22 and in Bibl. Or. III, II p. DCCLI–LIII), and an English translation of this is given in Appendix II below. Similar text is also seen in manuscripts of 1739 (Alkosh: Mingana Syri. 166, colophon).

7. God is asked to "choose" her "to the excellent work of diaconate". This expression is like in Ordination of a Deacon.
8. She is to "serve blamelessly before you".
9. She has to instruct and teach in modesty and in just and upright work.
10. She is to "receive reward of good works on the great and glorious day of the revelation of your only Begotten". It is same as in the Ordination of a Deacon.
11. Bishop lays his hand on her head.
12. She is to be "a dwelling place for your glorious Trinity."

This ordination rite is very formal and is similar to that of a Deacon.¹⁸

* * *

In the past, woman played a real part in the apostolic work of the church. During most of history, deaconesses were given some form of Ordination. They had "a laying on of the hands" and had certain liturgical and charitable duties.

They assisted women at Baptismal anointing; brought Holy Communion to women, supervised at divine worship, and prepared sacred vessels etc.

As monasticism spread and developed, and adult baptism decreased, the ministry of the female deacon appears to have lost in the West; meanwhile the role of the abbess began to grow in importance. She received a form of consecration similar to that of the deaconess.

St. Francis de Sales wanted to found a society of uncloistered women religious who would visit the poor; but the idea was not accepted at the time. St. Vincent de Paul succeeded in founding a society of sisters without public Vows. Soon active women religious emerged—Sisters of St. Joseph, Institute of the V. Mary etc. They did a lot of social work, but without any Ordination.

18. E. R. Hudson, *Women and the Diaconate*”, *Clergy Review*, 56 (1971) 886–90.

Women in the Church Today

Representations have already been made to the Bishops of the United States and Canada for admitting women to diaconate. Vatican II recommended that women play a more active role in Christian social action, and Pope Paul VI several times invited them to draw closer to the Alter in an effort to save mankind in contemporary crisis. Women work now in Papal Commissions like those on the Missions, and on Laity. They are increasingly consulted by Episcopal Conferences. They are being admitted in a large scale to theological studies. As lectors, parish social workers and catechists they use their talents to the service of the church. In many places, especially missions, they discharge duties that are normal to the office of a deacon.

Pastoral issue

Ordination of women to the official ministry of the Church is to be approached as a pastoral question. The matter can be thought of both from an ecclesiastical view point and from the everchanging cultural context of the role of women in the society.

Introducing women to the ministries of church should be seriously considered. We have a firm point of reference for this in the life, teachings, and attitudes of Jesus which stand in striking contrast to the Jewish tradition and the practice of his contemporaries. K. Stendahl's (1966) scholarly study of Galatians 3, 28 suggests a radical change of the attitude of the christianity in the relationship of men and women. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus".

It is clear from the Scripture and the traditions of the Church that never any *woman was ordained* to the full priesthood in the Catholic Church.¹⁹ But most scholars agree that women carried out a considerable ministry in the early Church and were, infact, liturgically initiated into their role of service. At the same time there is disagreement regarding the nature of this liturgical initiation or "Ordination". Whether women were sacramentally ordained to the official ministry is an unimportant question historically, because the notion of sacramentality, and in particular the sacramentality of Holy Orders, came to the consciousness of the Church at a later date.²⁰

In the Latin Church, historically there is a non-tradition concerning the ordination of women rather than a tradition against it. Romano-German Pontifical of the tenth century stands for the ordination of deaconess, as seen above; so also the Byzanthine Church speaks about cheirotomia of the deaconess.

The question of introducing women to ministries may be reconsidered in the light of the ecclesiology of the Oriental Churches.

19. L. K. Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of the women*, Philadelphia, The fortress Press, 1976.

20. JOHN J. BAGLEY S. J. and CARL J ARMBRUSTER S. J.
 "Women and Office in the Church", *The American Eccl. Review*
 Vol. 165, #3 November 1971.

VI

Restoration of the State of Deaconess - An Emergency and An Exigency

It is true that the tradition of admitting women to diaconate did not survive the era of early Christianity. But there are evidences that suggest to the ordination of deaconesses in the Oriental Churches (Maronite, Greek Orthodox) as late as the 18th century.

Lutheran and Anglican Churches were (among others) attentive to enrich the body of Christ by again calling women to the diaconate. There are 25,000 deaconess who profess poverty, Chastity and Obedience: they wear some religious habit, (a dark blue suit with a cross emblem on the arm, or only a cross emblem, a small veil). They have some type of community life (*Verband Schwestern* = allied to the mother house). An addition to these, there are 30,000 independent deaconesses in these Churches who have no community life.²⁰

The women can be best utilized in the areas of ministry like :

the sick - children, Schools / Colleges - invalids - Home for the Aged - shut ins. - and retreat houses.

Deaconess can play a liturgical / sacramental, catechetical, and prophetical role in the Church.

21. Ansgar Christansen, "The Deaconess Movement. A Catholic Appraisal", *Review for Religious* 28 (1969), 931.954.

Would the Ordination of women to diaconate positively assist the Church in responding to the demands of the Gospel and the challenges of the contemporary world?

1. Role of women in our society is changing rapidly in direction of facing equality with men.

2. The ministry of women in the Church would be a *new* kind of ministry. This will have patterns and forms of ministry proper to itself. Women would bring a different quality to certain ministries of the Church.

3. This will be a great boost to the status and dignity of women especially of the developing countries where religious traditions and cultural values are discriminating the women.

In this paper we have examined the position of the laity in the East Syrian tradition with special emphasis on the important role played by women in the liturgical celebrations and catechesis as deaconess in the Church. The position of deaconess in the East Syrian tradition is supported by the practices of other eastern churches, Roman Church as well as a few non catholic churches. In the present day context of the Church, selected educated, dedicated and mature catholic women can be of immense help in the apostolate. The restoration of the institution of the deaconess will be a positive contribution of the church in upholding the dignity of women and in affirming their equality with men in holding responsible positions in the Church. Besides, it will be an effective way to remedy the shortage of priests in many countries and to open a new field in the pastoral ministry with the maternal touch of the Mother Church. It will also satisfy to a certain extent the aspirations of the women who clamour even priesthood.

Appendix I

Ordination of a Deaconess in the Roman Church

(10th Century Romano-German Pontifical)

The text used as the basis for this translation is that of the Romano-German Pontifical of the Tenth Century as edited in C. Vogel, *Le Pontifical Romano-Germanique du dixieme siècle*, "Studie testi", No. 226, Texte 1 pp. 54-9. The "Missa ad diaconam consecrandam" is also found in M. Andrieu *Le Pontifical romain au Moyen Age*, "Studie testi", No. 86 tome I, pp. 168-9. XXIV. For the Ordination of a Deaconess:

1. When the bishop blesses the deaconess, he places the diaconal stole (orarium) on her neck. When she enters the church she wears this on her neck so that the top of the stole on either side is under the tunic.

Prayer. O Lord, graciously hear our prayers and send upon this your handmaid the spirit of your blessing so that, enriched with the heavenly ministry, she may both obtain your majestic grace and also offer an example of good living to others. Through.....

2. The Mass for consecrating a deaconess is as follows:

O God, save me by your name...Ps. For insolent men..... Closely hear our supplication and look with mercy on your handmaid. Out of reverence for you she has promised a life of virtuous continence", by your help may she keep it and by your generosity may she attain to the sixtyfold fruit of continence and to eternal life. Through.....

3. Lesson. See the Thursday after Pentecost Sunday (1 Corinthians 6: 15-20).

4. Graduale. From my needs... Versicle. To you, O Lord, Alleluia. Versicle. The Lord loved her and adorned her.

Here the Pontifical of Guillaume Durand has the following:

After the reading of the Epistle the deaconess prostrates herself before Altar; and, having said the two prayers above (see above, "O Lord, graciously" and "O God, lover"), the bishop hands the book of the Gospels to the deaconesses and gives them authority to read the Gospel at vigils and at the beginning of the Hours in the Church. He says to them altogether:

Receive authority to read the Gospel of vigils and to begin the Hours in the Church in the name of the Lord.

Response : Amen.

Then they kiss the hands of the Bishop.

The same Pontifical also states that if the bishop has made any of the consecrated virgins a deaconess, when she has received the crown, he gives her the book of homilies saying:

Receive authority to read the Gospel with the homily in the Church of God, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Response : Amen.

5. Then having prostrated herself before the Altar the litany is intoned.

6. When this is finished the bishop says this prayer over her: "O Lord, graciously hear our prayers and send upon this your handmaid the spirit of your blessing so that, enriched with this heavenly ministry, she may both obtain your majestic grace and offer an example of good living to others. Through.....

7. The consecration follows in the manner of a Preface; "O God you kept Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, in holy undefiled widowhood for forty eight years, although her wedlock scarcely lasted seven. She combined prayer and fasting day and night until you, her just remunerator, brought her even to the grace of prophecy on the occasion of the circumcision of your anointed one. Afterwards through apostolic institution of this order of holy women you made girls and young women to be prepared with the reception of holy oil. Deign, Almighty, most tender God, to receive the promise of your handmaid, a promise which is difficult and toilsome and not differing greatly from perfect virginity. For you, maker of all, know that your creatures cannot perfectly avoid the seductions of the world but when they rely on you and have you as their goal, terrible passions and the allurements of pleasure never disturb the souls which have once been made alive. For you deign to impress upon their senses that there is nothing more desirable than your kingdom, nothing more dreadful than your judgement. O, Lord, hear our prayer and give to this your handmaid the thirty-fold fruit of the married and the sixty-fold fruit of widowhood. Let there dwell within her discipline with compassion, honour with freedom, sobriety with kindness". Let her meditate on your work day and night so that when you call her back to you she may genuinely be that which you predicted through the spirit of prophecy. Through our Lord.....

8. Then the bishop places the orarium (diaconal stole) on her neck, saying: May the Lord clothe you with a garment of joy.

9. She herself places the veil on her head in front of everyone, having taken it from the Altar and meanwhile the antiphon is recited: I am espoused to him.

10. Prayer. O Lord, we beseech you with kindness and graciousness hear the prayers of your handmaid that with your help she may keep the grace of chastity which she has taken upon herself. Through.....

11. For the giving of the ring:

Receive the ring of faith, the seal of the Holy Spirit, so that you may be called the spouse of Christ if you serve him faithfully.

12. For the wreath (torquis or torques):

Receive the sign of Christ on your head, so that you may become his wife, and if you remain in his love you will be crowned forever. Then those who are present proceed with the antiphon: His ring.

13. O Lord, we beseech you, with the help of your bountiful love lead your handmaid to pardon in so far as she may need to be cleansed from all stain of sin. Look upon her with gracious countenance as she is reconciled to you through Christ. Forgive all her sins and in your pity spare her the severity of your judgement and graciously pour upon her the clemency of your mercy. Through.....

14. Then is intoned the Gospel according to St. John. At that time John answered and said: No one is able to receive (John 3: 27-30).

15. After the Gospel together with those who have been veiled she gives an offering into the hands of the bishop while the choir intones the offertory.*

* The English translation is from, J. Massyngherde Ford, "Order for ordination of a Deaconess, *Review for Religious* 33 (1974), 308-314. The author is indebted to the *Review* for reproducing this.

Appendix II

Apostolic Constitutions 8:17-20

Concerning the deaconess-- the constitution of Bartholomew XIX. Concerning a deaconess, I Bartholomew make this constitution: O bishop, thou shalt lay the hands upon her in the presence of the presbytery and of the deacons and deaconesses, and shalt say:

The formel prayer for the ordination of a deaconess. O Eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the creator of man and women who didst replenish with the spirit Miriam, and Deborah, Anna and Hulda; who didst not disdain that thy only begotten son should, be born of a woman; who also in the tabernacle of the testimony, and in the temple, didst ordain women to be keepers of Thy holy gates, do Thou now look also down upon to the office of a deaconess, and grant her Thy Holy Spirit, and "cleanse her from all filthiness of flesh and spirit", that she may worthily discharge the work which is committed to her to thy glory, and the praise of Thy Christ, withwhom glory and adoration be to Thee and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

Further, in the Constantinopolitan Rite of the Eastern Church the prayer is as follows:

O Lord God, who does not reject women who offer themselves in accordance with the divine will to minister in Thy holy places, but admittest them into the rank of ministers (leitourgoi) give the grace of Thy Holy Spirit even to this Thy handmaid, who desirest to offer herself to Thee, and to fulfill the grace of the ministry as Thou didst give the grace of Thy ministry unto phoebe.....

Appendix III

Ordination of Deaconesses (East Syrian)

(Translated by Sebastian Brock, Oxford from Assemani,
Codex Liturgicus XIII, 219–22.)

A sister from the nuns is chosen who is fairly advanced in years, who is rich in the task of the monastic life; and concerning whom there are testimonies of good works. The bishop bids that they bring her into the *Diakonikon* after the time of the Mysteries. The archdeacon presents her before the bishop, she having her hands folded and her head inclined, bowing to the waist, but not kneeling, because that is not laudible. The archdeacon intones: Peace. The priest prays, beginning, Our Father who art in heaven. Then he says, To you, Lord, have I raised up my soul, up to My eyes at all times. They sing the Gloria, and he begins the great Canon: Teach me, Lord, cause Your power to rest, our Lord, on Your handmaid, etc. He prays, beginning, To You have I lifted up., Pour out Your grace, our Lord, on Your handmaid. And when he finishes, the archdeacon intones: Peace. The bishop then prays, Our good God. Then the archdeacon intones: "Peace": and the bishop prays:

O Lord God Almighty, who made everything by the power of Your word, and by Your almighty commandment Your bidding created all beings, and You were pleased alike with men and women, so as to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit; do You, Lord, now too in Your compassion choose this Your weak handmaid to the excellent work of the diaconate, and grant her to serve blamelessly before You in this great and exalted ministry, being preserved without harm in the virtuous way of life, and may she be instructing and teaching modesty and

works that are just and upright, and may she be held worthy by You to receive the reward of good works on the great and glorious day of the revelation of Your Only-Begotten. To You and to Him and to Your Holy Spirit be praise, honour, thanksgiving and worship.

He raises his voice: now and always. And they respond: Amen. The bishop lays his hand on her head, not after the manner of an ordination, but he gives her a blessing, and prays over her a prayer of his own, according to his ability. And they begin this psalm: O Shepherd of Israel, hear, etc. They pray Strengthen, Lord, Your maidservant with Your grace and succour her with Your compassion enabling her to fulfil and carry out the will of Your Lordship at all times, O Lord of all. And another: Make your handmaid worthy, Lord, by your grace, to tremble at Your word and be fearful of Your judgement; may she be a dwelling Place for Your glorious Trinity at all times, O Lord of all. He concludes with the Gloria and thanksgiving. He bids her to be without pride.*

* Once of the other 16th cent. mss which contain this service is Cambridge Add. 1988 (of 1528, Monastery of Mar Hormizd, Iraq). Into there are a certain number of differences in the ordering of the prayers.

Printed at St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam, 1987

THE SYRIAN CHURCHES SERIES

JYOTHY BOOK HOUSE

K. K. ROAD, KOTTAYAM

KERALA, INDIA